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Chairman: Mr. Acharya (Nepal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 34: Questions relating to information
(continued) (A/61/21 and Add.1 and A/61/216)

1. **Mr. Muhith** (Bangladesh), speaking as Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced its report on its twenty-eighth session (A/61/21 and Add.1) and drew attention to the first two chapters, noting that with the appointment of Austria, the Committee now had a total of 108 members.

2. Chapter III gave a summary of the general debate, during which the Committee had had before it five relevant reports of the Secretary-General and five reports by the Department of Public Information (DPI). Of the 32 members and the one observer who had spoken, most had emphasized the central role of the United Nations in global affairs and of the Department as its public voice, a number of them commenting on the Department's role in peacekeeping operations and the strides it must make to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries. The United Nations website had been cited as an important source of information, but concerns had been expressed at the continuing disparity in treatment among the different official languages, which the Department should seek to remedy. Given the importance of traditional means of communication, the Department had been encouraged to continue building partnerships with local, national and regional radio broadcasters. Several speakers had also underlined the importance of promoting a dialogue among civilizations. Others had stressed the value of the presence of United Nations information centres in developing countries to improve the flow and quality of information, although the representative of one regional group had expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of the regionalization of the information centres in his area. Other speakers had welcomed the new strategic orientation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

3. Chapter IV of the report presented two draft resolutions, the first — identical to that of the previous year — on information in the service of humanity and the second on United Nations public information policies and activities, as well as one draft decision increasing the membership of the Committee.

4. In a resumed session in August 2006, the Committee on Information had taken note of the strategic framework of the Department of Public

Information for the biennium 2008-2009 and had forwarded it to the Committee for Programme and Coordination for review.

5. **Mr. Mammadov** (Azerbaijan) observed that reliable information, served to consolidate liberal principles such as pluralism, transparency and accountability, and hence free and easy access to public information and the dissemination of information were imperatives.

6. In its four-year process of reorientation, the Department of Public Information had steadily moved to implement the four strategic objectives set for it: the targeted delivery of public information, the enhanced use of the new information and communication technologies, increased partnership with civil society, and the integration of a culture of evaluation at all levels of work.

7. There was insufficient coverage of the Organization in the media, and the Department must act not only as the focal point for information policies but also as the primary news centre for the United Nations, and it must deliver timely, accurate, objective and non-biased news and information. In several cases, however, news digests and press releases had been unbalanced and inaccurate. It was very important for DPI personnel to maintain editorial independence, impartiality and accuracy.

8. In redirecting its activities, the Department should work in areas of special concern to developing countries and countries in transition, so as to close the information and communication gap between the developing and developed countries. Bridging the digital divide especially would allow the United Nations to address various socio-economic issues, such as the elimination of poverty, the promotion of development and the improvement of public health and educational systems.

9. The United Nations information centres should continue to disseminate information that would raise awareness of United Nations activities; in that regard, language remained an important factor in reaching local populations. The information centres should also continue their outreach to educational institutions and civil society.

10. **Ms. Zakharova** (Russian Federation) commended DPI for focusing attention on one of the key outcomes of the 2005 World Summit, the

establishment of the Human Rights Council, a topic that had been extensively covered in the Russian print and electronic media.

11. The growing cooperation of the media with Governments in counteracting terrorism was also a matter of great importance and should reflect the terms of Security Council resolution 1624 (2005) in order to avoid double standards. In June 2006, in cooperation with DPI, the Russian Federation had hosted the 14th international media seminar on peace in the Middle East, which had allowed representatives of Israel and Palestine and other involved States to communicate informally with world journalists, thus promoting objective coverage of events in that region.

12. The Department had done commendable work in covering the United Nations Small Arms Review Conference, as well as migration and development issues and the New Partnership for Africa's Development. It should continue to cooperate with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on a systematic and comprehensive communications strategy in support of peacekeeping operations, especially, the deployment in Lebanon.

13. The network of United Nations information centres should be further rationalized, and the same approach should be taken to all of them on budgetary, personnel and other issues. Information centres should not only deliver timely information on United Nations activities to the local media but also act as a link between the Organization and the civil society of a country. The Moscow information centre had been conducting conferences on various issues and organizing exhibits and round tables, while working in close cooperation with Russian non-governmental organizations and civil society.

14. The principle of multilingualism and the equality of all official United Nations languages should be reflected, in practice, in the provided news materials. The Department had indeed made steps towards language parity on the United Nations website. The Russian website, news centre and radio service had, for instance, been operating quite successfully.

15. The new strategy for the Library had allowed it to improve the exchange of knowledge and the links within the Secretariat, and its facilities for readers had also been enhanced, especially by the introduction of digital information.

16. It was well known that journalists, in defending freedom of speech and searching for reliable news, risked great dangers. His delegation felt particular pain over the cruel murder the previous week of the prominent Russian journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, and was grateful for all expressions of sympathy.

17. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia) said that her delegation had been pleased to learn, from the Secretary-General's report (A/61/216), that the Department had revised the main pages of its website to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.

18. The Department had done notable work to promote visibility of the Organization and to publicize key issues or events, such as international migration or the Small Arms Review Conference. Also, its collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) was essential to guaranteeing a flow of accurate information to troop-contributing countries. Timely and balanced coverage of facts and events within the United Nations system and in its Member States would restore and maintain the Organization's credibility.

19. The efficacy of the newly created regional group for Latin America and the Caribbean remained to be assessed; the particular characteristics of each country within a geographical area should not be forgotten, even while striving for greater consistency among the messages put out by the various United Nations country teams. All the activities of the Department and the United Nations information centres would benefit from adequate cooperation with the host Governments. The database to be established by DPI allowing access to all information centre workplans should prove useful. The information centre in Colombia processed a great volume of information because of the large United Nations presence there and should be strengthened. The centres generally were tools to help the world see not only the services and benefits of the United Nations but also the achievements made by the countries themselves.

20. Lastly, Colombia supported the proposed expansion of the membership of the Committee on Information.

21. **Ms. Miyoshi** (Japan) welcomed the initiative taken by DPI to accomplish reform and noted that the Department's annual conference for non-governmental organizations which had been held the previous month to discuss effective partnerships for human security

and sustainable development had been an important occasion to determine how the United Nations, Member States and international organizations could work together with non-governmental organizations in tackling many world issues.

22. The United Nations information centre in Tokyo — the only organization in the United Nations that disseminated information on the Organization in the Japanese language and, as such, receiving considerable support from her Government — had sought to deepen the Japanese people's understanding of the huge tasks the United Nations was expected to fulfil. The information centre would be in close communication with DPI with regard to the effectiveness of its own public relations activities. Japan hoped that adequate efforts would be made to publicize the importance of the relations between the United Nations and the various developed countries, because criticism was often heard by elected officials and the public in those countries concerning the high cost of supporting the United Nations.

23. Japan believed that Member States should reconsider the way that meetings of the Committee on Information were held and the relationship between that Committee and the Fourth Committee in order to find more efficient ways of conducting consultations.

24. **Mr. Jha** (India) welcomed the four strategic objectives outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/216) and news that programming on the UN Radio website was available inter alia in Hindi, Bengali and Urdu. As the gap in the technological capabilities between developed and developing countries was still broad, DPI must intensify its efforts to meet the needs of developing countries by combining traditional and new communications technologies. United Nations information centres (UNICs) must be assigned adequate resources and DPI should consult with host countries and other countries served by the centres in order to properly consider the geographical, linguistic and technological characteristics of the various regions.

25. DPI and DPKO should continue to work together and highlight DPKO success stories. DPI should be involved in the dissemination of information about DPKO missions from the beginning stages in order to create a better image for the United Nations and its peacekeepers worldwide.

26. The progress made in the development of the United Nations website was impressive, in particular improvements to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. Still, local language websites must remain a priority. He urged DPI to strengthen its efforts to collaborate with academia and civil society organizations, and noted that it had been the first United Nations department to implement an annual programme impact review for self-evaluation.

27. **Mr. Khan** (Pakistan) said that the role of DPI had assumed a greater dimension owing to polarizations and misunderstandings between societies and cultures. The United Nations was addressing those issues and it was vital for DPI to publicize the aspirations and resolve of the international community, as expressed in various decisions, in order to maximize their effect.

28. Pakistan attached high priority to the work of United Nations information centres. Those centres served as "mini-United Nations" and helped enhance the interest and involvement of local populations in the work of the Organization.

29. Noting the vast disparities that existed in the flow of information between the developed and the developing countries, he said that it was imperative to strengthen the information and communication infrastructures of the developing countries so that they could disseminate information about their societies to the rest of the world. The media of the developed world, with resources greater than the budgets of many countries, dominated the flow of information. Such an imbalanced flow of information jeopardized understanding and goodwill between societies, regions and cultures. Information should be used to bring peoples closer together instead of placing a wedge between them. That objective could be achieved — provided there was the necessary political will — by strengthening the information and communications infrastructure of the developing world. That task could be accomplished by the International Programme for the Development of Communications (IPDC) of UNESCO. That programme was mandated by the General Assembly every year; the Committee should receive a report from UNESCO in that regard.

30. DPI could best fulfil its mandate by utilizing such things as press releases which could reach a very wide audience. The press releases provided by the News and Media Division were vital to the dissemination of information about the United Nations system. The

Division needed to be strengthened in order to enhance its viability. His delegation also attached great importance to radio. The Urdu language broadcasts by the United Nations Radio were useful to people in his part of the world.

31. Finally, he said that the role played by the News and Media Division and the Radio and Television Service in support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) deserved to be acknowledged and he asked DPI to assure equitable access for journalists from developing countries to the Secretary-General for interviews.

32. **Mr. Alberto** (Angola) welcomed the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/216) and the efforts of DPI to open an information centre in Luanda to serve five developing countries. He reiterated his Government's offer to provide premises free of charge as evidence of its commitment to the enhanced dissemination of information, particularly in Africa. There was a clear need to develop different media for different audiences. Developing countries did not have the same news media technology as developed countries and, in that connection, an information centre in Luanda would serve the special needs of its target audience well.

33. He welcomed the work of UN Radio, in particular in Africa, and commended DPI on the redesign of and additions to the United Nations website. He called on DPI, together with other United Nations departments, to consider allocating special passes for counsellors and attachés of permanent missions so that they could more effectively conduct their business during the General Assembly.

34. **Mr. Maqungo** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, commended DPI on its communications campaigns, in particular on the United Nations Human Rights Council, and its continued focus on the question of Palestine and the promotion of Africa. It was also important for DPI to strengthen its collaboration with DPKO and to continue to promote the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission.

35. DPI should allocate adequate resources to ensure the effective functioning of the information centres and should consider the views of the host countries when implementing proposals. While there had been progress in narrowing the gap among official languages, DPI should continue to strive for parity among the languages on the website. He welcomed new initiatives

to draw attention to crucial issues often ignored by the media and stressed that DPI should also continue to use traditional media in disseminating the main messages of the United Nations, in particular in developing countries. He noted the proposals on strategic directions for United Nations libraries and stressed that the role of DPI should be further consolidated into the reform process.

36. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that DPI's role was to impartially and transparently provide people with accurate, comprehensive, timely and relevant information on the United Nations in order to strengthen international support for its activities. The Committee on Information had a vital role to play in that regard, and it should formulate a United Nations information policy that ensured harmony, goodwill and greater understanding.

37. DPI should continue its efforts to strengthen information dissemination to developing countries. In that connection, UNICs should be sufficiently funded in order to fully disseminate information to local populations. DPI should continue its efforts in areas of interest to developing countries, in particular in narrowing the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

38. Certain developed countries were taking advantage of their monopoly of modern communications technology in order to distort events in developing countries and damage their interests. Monopolized media was hampering efforts towards international peace and security and the United Nations, including DPI, should lead the international community in efforts to promote a new order of global information based on the free circulation of and more balance in its dissemination.

39. Freedom of expression was a human right that also implied a responsibility to respect the beliefs and rights of others. In that connection, sacrilege committed in the name of freedom of expression fostered resentment, hatred and hostility among peoples of different faiths. DPI should therefore continue its efforts to promote respect for and dialogue among all cultures, religions and civilizations.

40. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) said his country attached great importance to the establishment of a new world information order which would be fairer and more in keeping with the principles of the

United Nations and with the aspirations and cultural values of people throughout the world.

41. The United Nations, and in particular DPI, was responsible for making the voice of the Organization heard, explaining its objectives and making its activities better known throughout the world in both the developing and the developed countries.
42. His delegation thanked DPI for its efforts to promote causes that were important to the international community. The subjects on which resolutions had been adopted, particularly those of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies, figured largely in the information activities of the Organization. Matters of particular concern were foreign occupation, poverty, disease and the mobilization of the international community to address those evils.
43. Having carefully reviewed the report, his delegation thanked DPI for the enhancements made to the United Nations website, particularly those designed to afford access to blind and deaf persons. However, the Department needed to move quickly to achieve parity between the Organization's official languages. His delegation was concerned about the lack of equal use of the official languages on the United Nations website, particularly in relation to the Arabic pages. In that regard, he called for a more equitable allocation of human resources in order to achieve complete parity.
44. His delegation welcomed the outcomes of the Tunis phase of the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) and emphasized the importance of implementing all of the commitments aimed at bridging the digital divide.
45. He thanked DPI for organizing the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East that had been held in Moscow. In light of the continued Israeli occupation and the suffering of the Palestinian people, it was important for the Department to continue to organize such activities and to implement the special information programme on the question of Palestine.
46. DPI also had a valuable role to play in encouraging dialogue between civilizations and in establishing bridges of understanding between nations and peoples. In that regard, the Department's function was to prepare a suitable environment for such dialogue.
47. His delegation noted the increased cooperation of DPI with NGOs and the private sector. In light of that

fact, he reminded the Department that its noble purpose was to make information about the United Nations as widely available as possible and that it should not be influenced by external media.

48. In conclusion, his delegation emphasized how important DPI was in publicizing the important role played by the Fourth Committee, especially in the area of the eradication of colonialism.

49. **Mr. Swareldahab** (Sudan) said his delegation appreciated the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information and for the insights therein on efforts to reform the Department of Public Information (DPI). The Department's decision to promote a culture of constant evaluation was to be commended.

50. DPI was an important element in the pivotal role the United Nations played in world affairs. It was the voice with which the Organization spoke to the world on important issues such as sustainable development, disarmament, dialogue among civilizations, women's rights and HIV/AIDS. It was important to strengthen the growing relationships between the Department and the media in developing countries, particularly with regard to promoting the aims of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Millennium Development Goals.

51. While commending DPI for the improvements made to the United Nations website, he said that it was clear that the North-South digital divide had widened and was preventing the site from being used to its fullest extent. Therefore, it was imperative to create a mechanism that would enable the largest number of citizens of developing countries to make best use of the Internet, and of the United Nations website in particular. In that regard, he emphasized that more attention should be paid to the use of Arabic on the website and that all languages should be treated equally and provided with the necessary resources.

52. DPI played an important role in disseminating information about issues that were of concern to certain peoples, such as the efforts of the United Nations to eradicate colonialism. More information needed to be disseminated about the question of Palestine inasmuch as it was the central issue that constantly threatened security and peace in the Middle East. United Nations information centres played a central role in highlighting that issue as well as others that were vital to peace and security.

53. During 2006, the world had witnessed an unprecedented and unjustified attack against the religious symbols of Muslims. The insulting depictions of the prophet Muhammad in cartoons that had appeared in a number of publications had had a negative impact on international stability. To avoid such incidents in the future, the United Nations, through DPI and in cooperation with influential media outlets, should disseminate messages that promoted dialogue among civilizations and respect for religious beliefs.

54. **Mr. Nepal** (Nepal) said that information and communications contributed to the enhancement of human culture and civilization. DPI had played a major role in disseminating information on a variety of issues including sustainable development and the rights of women and children, and it had increased its partnership with civil society and had made concerted efforts to highlight the importance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, despite those efforts millions of people in the developing countries were out of reach of modern means of communication. DPI should strengthen its radio programming because radio and print media remained the most effective tools.

55. The United Nations information centres had become the main sources of information in the developing countries and it was important to provide more support to centres located in those countries. His Government recognized the importance of information and communications and had mainstreamed communications in the national development framework. His Government had prioritized the development of information and communications in the rural sectors. Furthermore, it was important to uphold the principle of freedom of expression. The national and international media had played a positive role during the peaceful people's movement for democracy in April 2006. His Government was concerned by the digital divide between the developed and developing countries and believed that developed countries should assist developing countries by transferring the appropriate technology to them. At the same time, there was an urgent need for the dissemination of information and training facilities in the developing countries, and DPI could play a more meaningful role in that regard.

56. **Mr. Sealy** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that CARICOM member States supported the

applications of the Dominican Republic and Thailand to become members of the Committee on Information. DPI played a crucial role in disseminating information on issues that impacted daily on the lives of people throughout the world. It was imperative that DPI should continue to build a constituency of support for the United Nations throughout the world and disseminate information on United Nations activities so that people had a clear understanding of the vital role played by the Organization.

57. From the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/216), it was clear that DPI had engaged in several thematic campaigns relating to the Human Rights Council, migration and development, the 2006 Small Arms Review Conference, regional issues in the Middle East, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Peacebuilding Commission and was continuing to cooperate with DPKO. It was particularly important to inform people about the difficult and dangerous role of United Nations peacekeepers.

58. The network of information centres made an important contribution to the work of DPI. His Government had taken note of the Secretary-General's proposals and had underwritten the rental cost of the information centre in the Port-of-Spain. The savings resulting from that decision should be applied to the relevant budget line so that the full allocation of financial resources for that centre was left intact. Staffing levels should also be increased by establishing the post of information officer in Kingston and recruiting an additional information officer in Barbados. In the interim period, it was hoped that the post of information officer at the Port-of-Spain centre would be filled by a suitably qualified and experienced national of Trinidad and Tobago. In order to illustrate the work of the United Nations in the Caribbean region the Port-of-Spain centre had established the practice of providing small groups of journalists with access to a prominent figure or expert. Furthermore, a series of six 90-second public service announcements for radio had been organized.

59. In the area of information and communication technology (ICT), steps were being taken to make the information centre web page more user-friendly. His Government was concerned by the digital divide and urged DPI to continue to raise awareness about the advantages of ICTs. The Port-of-Spain centre had also engaged in public outreach activities and had organized

programmes for secondary and tertiary education level students and officials based at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The establishment of the United Nations Communications Group-Trinidad and Tobago represented an important development that allowed for greater cohesiveness in the messages put forward by the various field offices in Port-of-Spain. However, his Government requested that financial resources continued to be made available for the United Nations Caribbean radio programme. Furthermore, the major media houses should be encouraged to be more receptive to the use of United Nations materials. Finally, his Government hoped that an appropriate level of coverage would be given to the observance in 2007 of the two hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

60. **Mr. Maboundou** (Congo) said that his Government welcomed the implementation of a culture of evaluation within DPI because it would ensure greater efficiency in the dissemination of information. Despite the fact that radio and television were the most effective communications tools, DPI should step up its efforts to assist the developing countries in the area of ICTs. Developing countries faced severe problems because of the digital divide. His Government welcomed the cooperation between DPI and DPKO and the improvements made to the United Nations website but urged DPI to continue its efforts to ensure that articles were translated into the official languages of the United Nations.

61. Finally, he expressed the hope that more resources could be provided to the information centres, which had a key role in improving the image of the United Nations, noting that any downscaling of the information centres should be carried out in close consultation with the host country and take into account the particular needs of each country and region. His Government noted with appreciation the role of DPI in promoting NEPAD objectives and focusing on the progress achieved in the region and on the remaining challenges.

62. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for Palestine) commended DPI for its dissemination of information on various United Nations activities and initiatives, and emphasized the importance of the Special information programme on Palestine which helped to increase the awareness of the international community with regard to the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. The Department should continue to help

the Palestinian people with the development of their media and the training of their journalists. Recalling General Assembly resolution 60/38, which requested that DPI organize and promote fact-finding news missions for journalists to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, he condemned the refusal of the Israeli occupation authorities to adhere to the resolution and called on them to implement it immediately.

63. DPI should pay more attention to the dialogue of civilizations in order to ward off the dangers of hatred, fanaticism and racism. The insults to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad that had appeared in some Western media pointed to the need for greater efforts to promote dialogue among civilizations. Recalling General Assembly resolution 60/4 on the subject, he said that the Department had an important role to play in promoting and facilitating dialogue among civilizations in the various activities of the United Nations.

64. Finally, his delegation praised the development of the Department's radio and television programming and the expansion of its partnerships with international radio and television broadcasters.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.